

# ‘Mother, Nature’ by Aoife Lyall

## Review by Matthew Macdonald



In this collection, her debut for Bloodaxe, Aoife Lyall presents a loosely connected sequence of poems that discuss motherhood as it has been for the poet. From pregnancy, pre-natal life, miscarriage, post-partum life and the adventure that is life with a baby, this collection is equal parts uplifting, devastating, illuminative, hopeful and triumphant.

From the first lines, the collection is a searing poetic exploration of love, loss, grief and beginnings that cannot be ignored. The opening poem, ‘Sounds of that Day’, begins with both feet planted firmly:

*When a silence came,  
It was your heart not beating.*

*Mother, Nature* does not shy away from the truth of things, especially when that truth is so often hidden or obfuscated. In society, as with many things that are bundled under the umbrella of “not affecting men”, the information on pregnancy is woefully one-sided, steeped in hushed tones and misdirection. For all the information we are given, there is an ocean of unknown understanding that we are kept from. As Lyall mentions in her preface: *In short, I knew how to beget a child: not how to become a mother.*

One of the things so evident in Lyall’s writing is the utterly compelling and incomparable love that exists between parent and child, how that shapes both

parties, and how impossible it is to shift from not-a-parent to parent without a complete re-evaluation of life and how it all fits together, as seen in 'Easter Sunday':

*...Then I will roll the stone  
Of my stomach back from the bed, and wonder  
When I will believe that I have risen with new life*

or 'Cuckoo':

*I am free to spend the day  
Being who I thought I was before.  
They tell me this is natural. That I'll get  
Used to it. But I, I can only walk the hours  
Until I see you again*

or 'Brough of Birsay, Orkney':

*... I close my eyes, see him as I saw you  
I tell him It's time.  
Come home. Come home. Come home.*

The shadow of loss and grief from miscarriage extends over much of this collection, and is expressed and handled with tenderness and love. In these moments, Lyall stands at the pinnacle of her poetic prowess, best evidenced in 'No flowers:by request':

*...A wake  
For weeks I am the grave they send  
The lilies to.*

'Month's Mind':

*In low voices we talk a little about the life  
You never lived, and the house you never lived in  
Is overwhelmed by all the people who didn't know to come*

and 'Trapeze':

*... If I open  
My eyes to the chance of falling  
I will fall. And down will come baby,  
Cradle and all*

Lyall's ability to express something that must feel borderline inexplicable, and to do it in such a clear, concise yet utterly wrenching way is testament to her dexterity as a writer.

The poems where Lyall turns her hand to celebrating life, love and the baby that grows over the course of the collection are equally as evocative, equally deft in their handling and equally as enthralling.

In 'Our neck of the woods':

*The walls are full of your markings, the house  
Is full of your scent and still you cannot settle  
So we roam the farm tracks and forest trails together*

Or 'While the others are away':

*Job done, you touch your fingers to my lips. I kiss  
Your hands and they taste of starch, and home*

Or 'Marlfield House':

*... they return you to me, delicate  
Fragrant sleeping flower, curled into yourself  
Like a white rose, all easy breaths and unfurled folds.*

In the poem 'Acrania', Lyall opens the mostly self-contained viewpoint of the poems to view the troubled history of her native Ireland and abortion. Presented as the final poem, a coda almost the core of the collection, it still holds the fire that prompted its writing, even while the political realities that it discusses are very different now.

What makes this collection such an astounding and life-changing read is how well it fuses the emotional core of the poems, with clear and immediate imagery and sensory data that brings every line to life and showcases the absolute talent of the poet in discussing these often overlooked topics.

A tour-de-force of poetic writing, this collection balances love and loss with equal consideration and skill and is a clear indicator of the consistent work that this poet will absolutely provide in the future.

Mother, Nature is published by Bloodaxe Books



In this collection, her debut for Bloodaxe, Aoife Lyall presents a loosely connected sequence of poems that discuss motherhood as it has been for the poet. From pregnancy, pre-natal life, miscarriage, post-partum life and the adventure that is life with a baby, this collection is equal parts uplifting, devastating, illuminative, hopeful and triumphant.

From the first lines, the collection is a searing poetic exploration of love, loss, grief and beginnings that cannot be ignored. The opening poem, 'Sounds of that Day', begins with both feet planted firmly:

*When a silence came,  
It was your heart not beating.*

*Mother, Nature* does not shy away from the truth of things, especially when that truth is so often hidden or obfuscated. In society, as with many things that are bundled under the umbrella of “not affecting men”, the information on pregnancy is woefully one-sided, steeped in hushed tones and misdirection. For all the information we are given, there is an ocean of unknown understanding that we

are kept from. As Lyall mentions in her preface: *In short, I knew how to beget a child: not how to become a mother.*

One of the things so evident in Lyall's writing is the utterly compelling and incomparable love that exists between parent and child, how that shapes both parties, and how impossible it is to shift from not-a-parent to parent without a complete re-evaluation of life and how it all fits together, as seen in 'Easter Sunday':

*...Then I will roll the stone  
Of my stomach back from the bed, and wonder  
When I will believe that I have risen with new life*

or 'Cuckoo':

*I am free to spend the day  
Being who I thought I was before.  
They tell me this is natural. That I'll get  
Used to it. But I, I can only walk the hours  
Until I see you again*

or 'Brough of Birsay, Orkney':

*... I close my eyes, see him as I saw you  
I tell him It's time.  
Come home. Come home. Come home.*

The shadow of loss and grief from miscarriage extends over much of this collection, and is expressed and handled with tenderness and love. In these moments, Lyall stands at the pinnacle of her poetic prowess, best evidenced in 'No flowers:by request':

*...A wake  
For weeks I am the grave they send  
The lilies to.*

'Month's Mind':

*In low voices we talk a little about the life  
You never lived, and the house you never lived in  
Is overwhelmed by all the people who didn't know to come*

and 'Trapeze':

*... If I open  
My eyes to the chance of falling  
I will fall. And down will come baby,  
Cradle and all*

Lyall's ability to express something that must feel borderline inexplicable, and to do it in such a clear, concise yet utterly wrenching way is testament to her dexterity as a writer.

The poems where Lyall turns her hand to celebrating life, love and the baby that grows over the course of the collection are equally as evocative, equally deft in their handling and equally as enthralling.

In 'Our neck of the woods':

*The walls are full of your markings, the house  
Is full of your scent and still you cannot settle  
So we roam the farm tracks and forest trails together*

Or 'While the others are away':

*Job done, you touch your fingers to my lips. I kiss  
Your hands and they taste of starch, and home*

Or 'Marlfield House':

*... they return you to me, delicate  
Fragrant sleeping flower, curled into yourself  
Like a white rose, all easy breaths and unfurled folds.*

In the poem 'Acrania', Lyall opens the mostly self-contained viewpoint of the

poems to view the troubled history of her native Ireland and abortion. Presented as the final poem, a coda almost the core of the collection, it still holds the fire that prompted its writing, even while the political realities that it discusses are very different now.

What makes this collection such an astounding and life-changing read is how well it fuses the emotional core of the poems, with clear and immediate imagery and sensory data that brings every line to life and showcases the absolute talent of the poet in discussing these often overlooked topics.

A tour-de-force of poetic writing, this collection balances love and loss with equal consideration and skill and is a clear indicator of the consistent work that this poet will absolutely provide in the future.

Mother, Nature is published by Bloodaxe Books

---

*(c) The Bottle Imp*